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Spooktacular Monster Concert at St. Paul's Church

By [Richard Parsons \(author.cfm?authorId=30\)](#)

October 28, 2011 - Greenville, NC:

A "Spooktacular Monster Concert" in a church? And sponsored by the [church](http://www.stpaulsepisopal.com/), the local AGO chapter, and the [East Carolina Musical Arts Foundation](http://www.opus126.com/)? Yes, indeed, and it was a lot of fun and included a quantity of some of the finest organ-playing I've heard in this space! The program included straight organ pieces, cornball "Halloween carols" sung to familiar tunes (the less said about these the better), two costume competitions, and a cornball skit or two.

High marks go to Casey Whaley for her overall organizational work and to inimitable M.C. Tim Price for their dual roles in this event. Price was a remarkable visual part of the show, in his balloon costume as a bunch of grapes. A cluster of green balloons surrounded his head with a cluster of purple balloons on his body. Only his face peering out of the greens and his legs and feet (in black tights and organ shoes) under the purple gave any idea of a person inside. At the keyboard with his back turned the effect was even more perfect. It was not clear whether he was a cluster of statutory grapes or the grapes of wrath.

Organists wear funny shoes. They are always shiny black, with leather soles and a trifle more heel than usual, especially for men's shoes. In a room full of people (at least 160) of all ages in costume, it was so easy to spot the players.

In addition to a superb job MC-ing, Price set the aural stage for the evening with a masterful improvisation of spooky sounds. The wind moaned and whirled and eerie suspensions moved among the string stops, all over long-held pedal points. While this was going on, "Scream," in a monk's long hooded robe and an Edvard Munch-inspired mask, advanced on a little girl in a kimono costume. Her sister, Dorothy, with her hair tied up and in ruby slippers, was impervious, but little kimono was having none of it and fled in screaming terror to her grandmother's arms.

Casey Whaley came next, with Mader's Fanfare Prelude. How could Mader have known to get it so right? Or perhaps, why does all early 20th-century organ music sound like Halloween? Haley' strong playing was by turns bombastic and creepy.

Cristiano Rizzotto Vidal Pessôa got to play "that" toccata, S.565, with five volunteers holding up various cue cards for the audience. Three of the volunteers were just right; one was too shy and held the card invisible at waist level; one was too full of herself and held the card up and danced around and carried on; but all in good fun. Pessôa, dressed in a vaguely South American costume, played an excellent, straightforward interpretation of the toccata only, in spite of the disruptions behind his back from the cued audience.

Bill Wood's scary song wasn't too successful, as there was too much going on in the church to set the really spooky atmosphere for his antiphonal song about the old woman who went to sweep the graveyard, but his variations and surprise ending were spot on.

Nara Newcomer, in the guise of Princess Leia (in the long white robe, not the metal bikini), played the Dorian Toccata, S.538, cleanly, precisely, and at a fast pace. The way she pushed the keyboard part along against the big pedal line was extremely effective.

Bill Hilderbrandt had some help making the Praeludium in C minor, S.546, sound spooky, as a little girl was (apparently) being offered up in some kind of sacrifice in the rear of the church and provided all the sound effects even a Hollywood director could have called for. Hilderbrandt's playing was precise but somewhat slow. We know from *The Bach Reader* that Bach the organ consultant was known to pull out all the stops and play the fullest chords possible, to test the

EVENT INFORMATION

Greenville -- (Fri., Oct. 28, 2011)
[East Carolina Musical Arts Education Foundation , St. Paul's Episcopal Church: Organ Spooktacular Recital \(eventDetail.cfm?eventId=3613\)](#)
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bellows. There was a little of that in the Praeludium, but the painful, over-the-top volume contributed to the spooky effect.

Krista Melcher played the Pasticcio of Langlais. Her very clean playing emphasized the strangely modal nature of this piece, perfect for Halloween.

Scanlon got around to it: Toccata de M. Lanquetuit. Marcel Lanquetuit was an early 20th c. French composer. This toccata, the biggest piece of the evening, was more perfect, creepy Halloween music, played by Andrew Scanlon, costumed as a beekeeper.

In addition to all the fun of the costumes and screams, this evening featured more Bach in one concert than I've heard on the Fisk. It was delightful and suggests that a serious all-Bach recital would be a fine thing to do. It was also interesting to be able to contrast the rhetorical devices of 20th c. French organ music with the rhetorical devices of 18th c. Germany on this most rhetorical of holidays.

The extremely informal nature of the evening may have contributed to the playing being consistently of a very high quality. I'm always suspicious when I hear an event billed as "the first annual." Tonight was the second annual Spooktacular; I look forward to the third!

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